

POLICY NOTE

Key Findings

1. *In 2009, Washington's legislature directed the State Board of Education to create an annual Achievement Index to rate the quality of the state's 2,212 schools.*
2. *In 2013, the State Board of Education, under pressure from the U.S. Department of Education, significantly revised the Index to include student growth measures in school rankings.*
3. *Results from the new Achievement Index for school year 2012-13 show that 4% of schools received an Exemplary rating (A), 12% received a Very Good rating (B), 23% received a Good rating (C), 25% received a Fair rating (D), 12% received an Underperforming rating (F), and 5% received a Lowest 5 Percent (F). The remaining 18% of schools were not rated.*
4. *Senior elected leaders, including Governor Inslee, have recommended giving public schools letter grades so the public can understand how well schools are fulfilling their paramount duty to provide for the education of every child.*

What grade did your school receive?

The 2013 Public School Achievement Index

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In 2009, the Washington legislature directed the State Board of Education to create an Achievement Index to inform parents about the quality of the state's 2,212 public schools.

Results for the 2013 School Achievement Index, for school year 2012-13, are now available.

- Nearly half of public schools, 940 schools, or 42%, received a D ranking or lower.
- 782 schools, 35%, received a B or C ranking.
- Only 90 public schools, 4%, received an exemplary A ranking.
- 400 schools, or 18%, were not rated.

Governor Jay Inslee has recommended “a system in which every school in the state receives a letter grade that’s accessible to parents.”¹ The purpose is to let parents and the general public know how well public school administrators are fulfilling their paramount duty to provide for the education of every child.

The six rankings used by the State Board of Education are Exemplary, Very Good, Good, Fair, Underperforming and Lowest 5%. Following Governor Inslee’s recommendation for letter grades for public schools, Washington Policy Center reports these at A, B, C, D, F and F-.

In creating the Achievement Index, the legislature provided: “The SBE [State Board of Education] has responsibility for implementing a statewide accountability system that includes identification of successful schools and districts, those in need of assistance and those in which state intervention measures are needed.” Full results for the 2013 Public School Achievement Index are shown on the next page.

1 “Inslee clarifies: He favors A-F school grading system—under his conditions,” by Brian M. Rosenthal, *The Seattle Times*, April 9, 2013, at blogs.seattletimes.com/politicsnorthwest/2013/04/09/inslee-clarifies-he-favors-a-f-school-grading-system-under-his-conditions/.

Category	Rank	Number of Schools	Percentage of Schools
Exemplary	A	90	4%
Very Good	B	268	12%
Good	C	514	23%
Fair	D	554	25%
Underperforming	F	267	12%
Lowest 5%	F-	119	5%
Not Rated	--	400	18%

Conclusion

A letter grading system gives parents and taxpayers a clear, understandable measure of each school's performance in serving the learning needs of children. Educators give letter grades to students every day to assess academic progress through the year. In the same way, letter grades for schools would show policymakers and the public how well schools are performing.

Methodology

For 2013 the State Board of Education significantly changed how the Achievement Index ranks schools. The changes reflect the requirements of the U.S. Department of Education and anticipate the federal Smarter Balanced test to be taken by Washington students in 2015.

The 2013 Achievement Index gives schools a Composite Index score based on data from the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years and based upon three performance indicators: Proficiency, Student Growth and Career and College Readiness. The Proficiency Indicator is based on a rating of the percent of students meeting the state standard in reading, mathematics, writing and science (content areas equally weighted) as follows:

% Met Standard	Rating
90-100%	10
80-89.9%	9
70-79.9%	8
60-69.9%	7
50-59.9%	6
40-49.9%	5
30-39.9%	4
20-29.9%	3
10-19.9%	2
0-9.9%	1

For the Index values assigned to schools for the other two indicators, Student Growth and Career and College Readiness, see the State Board of Education’s Index Methodology.²

The Index weights scores for elementary and middle schools on these three indicators as follows: 40% for the percentage of students (and targeted subgroups of students) who meet the state academic standard by showing proficiency on state tests and 60% for the school’s median student growth percentiles. A student growth percentile is a score given to each student based on the change, or growth, in his test scores from year to year, relative to other students with similar test scores. Schools are assigned an Index value based on the median of its student growth percentiles.

The Index weights scores for high schools on the three indicators as follows: 33% for the percentage of students, and targeted subgroups of students, who meet the state academic standards in reading, math, writing and science, 33% for their median student growth percentiles and 33% for their high school graduation rates.

2 “Methodology, Business Rules, and Data Components used in the March, 2014 revised Washington State Achievement Index,” State Board of Education, April 2014, page 5, at www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/AchievementIndex/IndexMethodology.pdf.